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The language of musical technique in greek epic diction

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Γαῖ εὐρύστερνος, πάντων ἔδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ
Hésiode, *Théogonie* 117.

According to Greek tradition, the first treatise «On music» (Περὶ μουσικῆς) was that of Lasus of Hermione, the eminent musician and musicologist of the late sixth century (Mart. Cap. 9.936; *Suda* s.v. Λάσος). Prior to this, of course, Greece enjoyed a flourishing and highly refined musical culture, both in the melic poetry of the Archaic period and the epic tradition which reached its last great flowering with the Ionic or «Homeric» school. Clearly the practitioners of these earlier styles were able to communicate to each other, and to their students, the essentials of their τέχνη (West 1992a: 218). Therefore, prior to Lasus – or whoever was first to write on the subject – there existed in oral tradition a «technical» musical vocabulary. Some of these words may have persisted, changed or unchanged, into the Classical and later periods (two ready examples are the string names ὑπάτη and νήτη, since these superlatives, known to Homer, dropped from ordinary speech at an early date: see West 1981: 120). Naturally, this continuity would have been most evident in the earliest written works; unfortunately, no treatises have survived from the two centuries which separate Lasus from the (substantially extant) *Elementa Harmonica* of Aristoxenus in the late fourth century. In this paper I shall attempt to illuminate this lost language with evidence drawn from archaic Greek poetry, and especially epic diction. The material I shall discuss is largely indirect, of course, since none of the poems purports to be a technical treatise. And yet the poets appear to have employed «fragments» of their professional vocabulary in the not-infrequent passages which have music as their theme.

It is not surprising that this material is most concentrated in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, where the lyre and its music – the proper domain of the poet himself – are a main point of contention between Apollo and his new-born brother. A brief consideration of this struggle is needed to establish the quasi-technical character of the passages from which my detailed evidence is drawn.

Apollo is amusingly portrayed as a jealous older sibling who is threatened by a new addition to his family. For Hermes, with the theft of Apollo's cattle, his precocious musicianship, and insistent demands for prophetic knowledge, is aggressively grabbing at his brother's toys. In this way the poet exploits Hermes' traditional role as divine thief – a charge leveled by the resentful Apollo as he grudgingly admires the sound of the new tortoise shell lyre (φηλήτα, 446). Sibling rivalry among divinities is necessarily a theogonic struggle: the birth of a god requires a new allotment of power, and Apollo must now make room for an interloper. This theme is brought to the fore when Hermes, to demonstrate his invention, sings a theogony (426-434). As the infant delights in the new plaything, his song within a song is a query to the powers that be: Hermes ponders his place within the wide world, knowing that a new line must be added to the poets' list of allotments, for he is latest and last «according to age» (κατὰ πρέσβιν).

Apollo, of course, has had his own domain prior to Hermes' birth, and according to the poem's internal chronology this included music. In response to his brother's prodigious musicality, Apollo himself asserts (somewhat petulantly, one might imagine) that he is *already* an attendant of the Muses (450 sq.):

καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ Μούσῃσιν Ὀλυμπίδεσσιν ὀπηδός,
τῇσι χοροὶ τε μέλουσιν καὶ ἀγλαὸς οἶμος ἀοιδῆς
καὶ μολπή τεθαλυῖα καὶ ἡμερόεις βρόμος αὐλῶν.

For I too am a follower of the Muses of Olympus,
To whom the splendid path of song and choruses are dear,
And flowering lyre-play [μολπή] and the lovely rumble of *auloi*.

The antithesis of μολπή and αὐλῶν strongly suggests that the former be understood as lyre-music; its more usual (but vague) translation as «song and dance» is further excluded by the otherwise redundant mention of χοροὶ and ἀοιδῆς in the preceding verse (Gemoll 1886: ad loc.); this interpretation is supported by 475 sq. (ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ οὖν τοι θυμὸς ἐπιθύει κιθαρίζειν, / μέλπεο καὶ κιθάρηζε) and Homeric passages where μολπή is allied with stringed-instrument performance¹; note also Euripides *HF* 683 sq. παρά τε χέλυσος ἐπτατόνου μολπᾶν. What is strange, as Gemoll noted, is that stringed-instrument music should be acknowledged here when Hermes has only just invented the lyre!²

That Hermes' lyre is not the first of all stringed instruments is confirmed later in the poem by the unambiguous testimony of Apollo himself, when he bursts out (514 sq.):

δεῖδια Μαιάδος υἱὲ διάκτορε ποικιλομήτα
μή μοι ἀνακλέψῃς κίθαριν καὶ καμπύλα τόξα.

Son of Maia, wily-minded messenger, I fear that
You might snatch away from me the κίθαρις and angled bow!

At first glance one might read ἀνακλέψῃς as «steal back» – that is, Apollo is afraid that Hermes will recant his gift of the lyre and thereby deprive him of his marvellous new acquisition. But this interpretation is excluded by mention of the bow, with which Hermes has had nothing to do as yet. One might cavil that mention of the bow is a simple slip of the poet's tongue (or pen). And yet it is the very detail of the bow which gives the passage its poetic potency. The verses echo the older *Hymn to Apollo*, with which our poet will have been familiar, in which Apollo, during his own prodigious childhood, leapt from the cradle to stake his claim among the gods (*H. Ap.* 127-132):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ Φοῖβε κατέβρωσ' ἄμβροτον εἶδαρ,
οὐ σέ γ' ἔπειτ' ἴσχον χρύσειοι στρόφοι ἀσπαίροντα,
οὐδ' ἔτι δεσμά σ' ἔρυκε, λύοντο δὲ πείρατα πάντα.
αὐτίκα δ' ἀθανάτησι μετηύδα Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
εἴη μοι κίθαρις τε φίλη καὶ καμπύλα τόξα,
χρήσω δ' ἀνθρώποισι Διὸς νημερτέα βουλήν.

But Phoebus, when you'd finished off the godly provender,
Then the golden blankets could not hold you back,
And no bond restrained you any longer, and all ties were undone.
And at once to the immortals Phoebus Apollo pronounced:

1. Bielohlawek (1924-5) showed that the radical meaning of μολπή is «play», as can still be seen from *Il.* 13.233: κυνῶν μέλπηθρα γένοιτο (cf. 17.255). Elsewhere in Homer the word had become quite protean, variously comprising «dance», «song», or «song and dance», with or without the φόρμιγξ. By the Archaic period, μολπή means specifically «song» (where stringed music is often implicit). Of the many Homeric passages, those which bear most closely on the present problem are *Od.* 1.152: μολπή τ' ὀρχηστὺς τε, of Phemius' impending performance; 21.430 μολπή καὶ φόρμιγγι.

2. Gemoll 1886: 244, which bears quoting in full: «Was hier unter *molpe* zu verstehen ist, kann kaum fraglich sein. Die Verbindung mit der Flötenmusik macht es wahrscheinlich, dass hier das Saitenspiel gemeint ist. Da nun aber das Instrument des Hermes offenbar das erste sein soll, so könnte man vielleicht annehmen, dass *molpe* hier s.v.a. tanz sein soll. Weil aber Chorreigen und Gesang in vs. 451 schon erwähnt sind, bleibt nur noch die Instrumentalmusik. Dass nun von Apollon ausgesagt wird, dass er sowohl Saitenspiel als Flötenmusik liebte, ist nicht wunderbar, aber dass, wo die Kithara eben erst erfunden ist, schon des Saitenspiels gedacht wird, das ist das Merkwürdige».

Let me have as mine the κιθάρις and angled bow,
and I shall proclaim to men the unerring will of Zeus.

κιθάρις... καὶ καμπύλα τόξα in the *Hymn to Hermes* is formulaic (noting too that καμπύλα τόξα is frequent elsewhere in Homer, often in this position³) and would have called to mind a traditional theme, the ancient «harmonic» association of bow and lyre (see further Franklin 2002a: 2-5). This is best known perhaps from Heraclitus (22B51), but clearly was equally familiar to the epic singers – and indeed to Homer himself, as shown by the archer-kitharist simile (*v. infra*).

That chordophone music is already in Apollo's domain is further reflected in the striking use throughout the poem of the verb (ἐγ)κιθαρίζειν, despite the fact that, organologically speaking, it is actually the tortoiseshell λύρα that Hermes has invented (17, 425, 433, 455, 475 sq., 510); note especially 423 (λύρη... κιθαρίζων) and 499 (κιθαριν δὲ λαβών; cf. 509)⁴. In the Nicomachean catalogue (*v. infra*), the same careful qualification is made: it is not the lyre as a class that Hermes invented, but «the one made from the tortoise» (τὴν λύραν τὴν ἐκ τῆς χελώνης); «did the Greeks remember an earlier lyre?» inquired *Winnington-Ingram* in the margin of his copy of Jan 1895 (kept at the Institute of Classical Studies in London). Other sources credit Apollo with playing the κιθάρα before Hermes finds the tortoise⁵. This mythological conflict is reflected in two of Pausanias' descriptions (5.14.8-9, 9.30.1): an altar at Elis was shared by Hermes and Apollo, the one having invented the λύρα, the other the κιθάρα, while on Mount Helicon was a bronze of Apollo and Hermes «fighting for the lyre» (μαχόμενοι περὶ τῆς λύρας). Perhaps most significant is the testimony of Lucian (*DDeor* 11.4), where Apollo admits that young Hermes plays so well that «even I am jealous of him, though I have been pursuing the κιθάρα for ages» (κάμει αὐτῷ φθονεῖν πάλαι κιθαρίζειν ἀσκοῦντα).

This is why Hermes can address Apollo as «knowing how to sing beautifully and well, in the proper fashion» (καλὰ καὶ εὖ κατὰ κόσμον ἐπιστάμενος ἀγορεύειν, 479). This language too is formulaic, belong-

ing to a larger family of expressions – what may be called a «multiform phrase» (cf. Lord 1991: 27 ff., 76) – which often have musical applications.

κατὰ κόσμον («in due order», lit. «according to the cut»?) had a specific application to heroic singing, describing the proper sequencing of scenes and themes that defined a given tale or μῦθος – a skill of basic importance in sung narrative (Heubeck/West/Hainsworth 1988: 1.378; cf. the Yugoslav testimonies in Lord 1960: 26-29). This sense is most evident in the passage of the *Hymn to Hermes* which describes the god's proper ordering of his theogony (433, πάντ' ἐνέπων κατὰ κόσμον). The phrase appears in the same metrical position in Odysseus' praise of Demodocus for his recounting of the Achaeans' travails (*Od.* 8.489 κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν οἶτον ἀείδεις)⁶. Note also *b. Bacch.* 59 (κοσμήσαι αἰοιδὴν) and *Od.* 8.496 (κατὰ μοῖραν).

εὖ... ἐπιστάμενος is a refraction of the more common εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως which commences many a hexameter. Describing good workmanship generally, this may be regarded as a technical phrase in that it describes the «well and knowledgeable» execution of a τέχνη (*Od.* 20.161, 23.197, *Hes. Op.* 107; cf. *Il.* 2.611, *Od.* 4.231, 9.49, 17.341, 21.44). ἐπιστάμενος/-ως («knowledgeable/-ably») appears by itself elsewhere in the context of epic expertise. Alcinous likens Odysseus to a singer who has told his tale ἐπισταμένως (*Od.* 11.367 sq. σοὶ δ' ἐπὶ μὲν μορφή ἐπέων, ἐνὶ δὲ φρένες ἐσθλαί, / μῦθον δ' ὥς ὅτ' αἰδοῦς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας). Compare the quasi-musical context of 19.457 (δῆσαν ἐπισταμένως, ἐπαιοιδῇ δ' αἶμα κελαινὸν / ἔσχεθον, «they bound [sc. the wound] knowledgeably and with an incantation held back the black blood»).

It is not simply the case, then, that Apollo already «knows how to sing well». He is master of an existing idiom, characterized with special poetic language reserved by the tradition to describe performers, performance, and other musical facts. The same was said of Hermes' musical debut; thus, despite being an innovator (as well as an infant), he himself sings his theogony within the bounds of established epic technique (the *Hymn* itself being, of course, a post-Hesiodic composition). Note that in this passage one might equally construe κατὰ κόσμον with both κιθαρίζων and ἐνέπων, so that proper instrumental performance becomes included in the epic τέχνη – just as Homer describes a citharode as ἀνὴρ φόρμιγγος ἐπιστάμενος καὶ αἰοιδῆς (*Od.* 21.406).

6. For a detailed (and favorable) evaluation of Demodocus' songs from the perspective of epic composition, see Pralon 1997.

3. *Il.* 3.17, 5.97, 10.333, 12.372, 21.502; *Od.* 9.156, 21.359, 362.

4. Maas & Snyder (1989: 27) note that κιθάρις and φόρμιγγς appear to be used in connection with Apollo, λύρη with Hermes: «the association of the phorminx with Apollo helps clarify what at first appears to be the poet's hopelessly arbitrary choice of names for the instrument».

5. Paus. 8.31.3 sq. describes a relief of Pan with syrinx and Ἀπόλλωνος κιθαρίζων, bearing the inscription that «they are of the first gods» (εἶναι σφᾶς θεῶν τῶν πρώτων); [Orph.] *A.* 282; Isid. *Etym.* 3.22.2: *juxta opinionem autem Graecorum citharae usus repertus fuisse ab Apolline creditur* («But according to the Greeks' belief, the use of the κιθάρα is believed to have been invented by Apollo»), afterwards mentioning Hermes and the λύρα.

This last passage occurs in Homer's archer-citharode simile of Book 21. Here Alcinous' comparison of Odysseus to an epic singer (*v. supra*) finds its diapsaon in the archery contest, when Odysseus, bending his bow, is compared to a «knowledgeable» citharode stringing his lyre (406-411):

ὥς ὅτ' ἀνὴρ φόρμιγγος ἐπιστάμενος καὶ ἀοιδῆς
 ῥηιδίως ἐτάνυσσε νέω περὶ κόλλοπι χορδὴν.
 ἄσπας ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἐυστροφὲς ἔντερον οἴος.
 ὥς ἄρ' ἄτερ σπουδῆς τάνυσεν μέγα τόξον Ὀδυσσεύς.
 δεξιτερῇ δ' ἄρα χειρὶ λαβὼν πειρήσατο νευρῆς·
 ἢ δ' ὑπὸ καλὸν ἔεισε, χελιδόνι εἰκέλη αὐδὴν.

As when a man, who knows both singing and the phorminx,
 Lightly stretches a string around a new tuning-strip,
 Fastening the well-turned sheep-gut from both ends,
 So Odysseus, in no great hurry, strung the giant bow.
 In his right hand grasping it he tried the string;
 And, like a swallow's voice, it sang a beautiful accompaniment.

Expanding poetically on the traditional pairing of bow and lyre seen in the epic formulation discussed above, this passage corresponds to the ephrastic bow-stringing scene of *Il.* 4.104-126. It provides a professional musical context in which to present Odysseus as a warrior-poet bringing his own epic to its proper conclusion (κατὰ κόσμον) through the instrument of the bow. For in early Greek poetry, cognition and intellectual process, normally the domain of the poet, could be symbolized by archery (Sansone 1975: 7-10, 85). This is best seen perhaps in Pindar's word-joined tongue» which discharges a hail of verbal arrows (*Pi. I.* 5.46 sqq); one thinks also of Homer's «winged words». This conception may even be an Indo-European poetic inheritance (*cf.* Dumézil 1995: 139 f.; Franklin 2002a: 2).

We find another technical and formulaic «fragment» in the *Odyssey* passage, ὑπὸ καλὸν ἔεισε(v). To judge from its two appearances in the *Hymn to Hermes* (54, 502), the phrase was normally used of «singing under» the lyre – with its accompaniment or along with it⁷. This sense is reversed in the *Odyssey* passage, however, where it is a string – in this case a bowstring – which «accompanies» the action of a «performer» – thus developing the motif of the «sounding bowstring», doubtless a conventional detail in archery set-pieces like that of *Iliad* 4. Clearly the expression ὑπὸ καλὸν ἔεισε(v) was stable enough in Homer's time to support this sort of image-play. The invertibility of the idea is further

reflected in a variant reading of the *Iliad* which goes back to a learned debate of the third century B.C. between Alexandrian editors of Homer. Zenodotus» emendation λίνος δ' ὑπὸ καλὸν ἔειδε («the flaxen string sang along beautifully») parallels the *Odyssey* passage, while Aristarchus championed what may be taken as the standard usage – and what actually appears in the manuscripts of Homer: λίνον δ' ὑπὸ καλὸν ἔειδε («he sang the Linus-song beautifully to the instrument's accompaniment»⁸).

Odysseus' trial of the bowstring (πειρήσατο νευρῆς) is a further musical allusion to a technique openly described in the *Hymn to Hermes*. When the god has finished constructing his lyre, «he tested it for its tuning with a pick» (πλήκτρῳ ἐπειρήτιζε κατὰ μέλος, 53; the verse is repeated exactly at 419, and with a variation at 501). With both bow and lyre, the purpose of this must be to see whether the string is properly strung or tuned (the expression κατὰ μέλος is discussed below)⁹. This state is encapsulated in a little-known but fundamental definition of ἀρμονία preserved in an Aristophanic scholion (ad *Ar. Eq.* 994; *cf.* the variation in the *Suda* s.v. ἀρμονίαν):

ἀρμονίαν οἱ μουσικοὶ καλοῦσι τὸ εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως εἶναι τὰς νευρὰς ἐν τοῖς κρούμασι τῶν ᾠσμάτων.

Musicians call it ἀρμονία when, in the accompaniment of songs, the strings are [sc. tuned] «well and knowledgably».

That τὸ «εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως» εἶναι τὴν νευρὰν may as a whole be read dactylically (– | – – – | – – – | – | – – | – –) is no doubt chance, given the normal metrical position of εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως in line-initial position, as well as the prosaic nature of the articular infinitive. What is clearly not coincidental, however, is the embedding of this phrase in a definition which has quite clearly come from a music-technical context. What could be the source of such a definition? A music theorist, like any other writer, might quote an epic formula simply as a way of enhancing the tone of a discussion. But since εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως seems to have had musical overtones in epic diction, is it not more likely that the ἀρμονικός in question integrated this phrase in order to maintain some continuity with earlier, oral music vocabulary? If so, then this curious definition would reflect the shift from oral to written associated by tradition with Lasus. Musical literacy itself – that is, musical notation – may

8. *Il.* 18.570 with scholia (Erbse 4.555). As Aristarchus pointed out, the same ambiguity appears in the expression «to sing the *paian*/to sing *Paian*» (e.g. *Il.* 1.472 sqq.). See also comments of Edwards 1991 ad loc.

9. The testing of musical strings is also described at *Ov. Met.* 5.399 *Calliope querulas praetemptat pollice chordas*, 10.145 sqq. cited below; *Stat. Ach.* 1.187 *fila movet leviterque expertas pollice chordas*.

7. For ὑπο- in the sense of «responding to», see Buttery 1977: 7.

well have begun in the time of Lasus or shortly thereafter during the musical efflorescence of the Argolid (Hdt. 3.131-2), as suggested by certain distinctive letter forms in the archaic core of the Greek instrumental notation system (Westphal 1867: 389 ff., with corrections of West 1992b: 38-42). This is also when traditional oral composition was being transformed by the art of writing. The poet of the *Battle of Frogs and Mice*, for instance, makes a point of revealing his literate method ([Hom.] *Batr.* 3). Among the *Hymns*, the clearest example of literate interference is the *Hymn to Hermes* itself (Janko 1982: 41 f., 149). Elsewhere the term ἀρμονία comes up twice in connection with Lasus. Martianus Capella, who purports to represent the contents and organization of Lasus' treatise, may imply that it brought the study of *harmonia* to a wider, more popular audience¹⁰. Lasus is besides the first to attest securely the word as «musical tuning» (fr. 1 [PMG 702])¹¹. Since Lasus was himself a poet, could it be that the metrical definition of ἀρμονία came from the alleged Περί μουσικῆς, committed to writing in quasi-traditional form?

At any rate, such a fusion of prose and poetry is, to the best of my knowledge, otherwise unparalleled in the corpus of Greek music theory – unless one include the curious mythological patchwork, traditionally attributed to Nicomachus of Gerasa (fl. c. 100 A.D.) but quite possibly excerpted from some other ἀρμονικός¹², which catalogues the history of the seven-stringed lyre (*Exc.* 1 [266.2-17 Jan]; cf. *Exc. Neap.* 23 [418.10-12 Jan]):

10. Mart. Cap. 9.936: *me Lasus, ex urbe Hermionea vir, mortalibus divulgaret* («Lasus, a man from the city of Hermione, revealed me [sc. Harmonia] to mortals»).

11. It may well appear, however, a century earlier in Sapph. fr. 70.9-11 (Voigt): [αρμονίας] ἰδὲ / [αθην] χόρον, ἀα / [ἰδ]ε λίγη, where χόρον and especially λίγη provide the context, as against e.g. the wedding of Harmonia; cf. *Il.* 18.569: φόρμιγγι λιγείη, etc.; Sapph. fr. 103.6-9 (Voigt): [δ]ιππ[ι]στ' αἰοῖται φρέν[ι]... [αν] / [ἰ]σ[τ]αιοῖσα λιγύραν [α]οῖδαν / γάμβρον, ἄστροι γάμ[β]ροι ὑμ[α]λιν[ι]κ[ι] / [ἰ]σε φόβ[αι]σιν[ι]ν[ι]ν θεμ[ε]ν[ι]να λύρα; Stesich. 278 PMGF: ἄγε Μοῦσα λίγει'... / ... φθεγγόμενα λύραι.

12. For Nicomachus' dates, see Jan 1895: 211; Levin 1975: 9 f. For the attribution of the *Excerpta* to Nicomachus (with some possible exceptions), see Jan 1895: 225 ff. Mathiesen (1999: 392 f., 406) plausibly regards the *Excerpta* as largely a collection of scholiastic «commentary» on the *Encheiridion* (citing the σχόλια τινα εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν [sc. Nicomachus] of some MSS). One may support this with the not infrequent disagreements between the two «books» (for example, the planet-string equations given at *Ench.* 3 [241.18-242.11 Jan] and *Exc.* 3 [271.16-272.6 Jan]). It is tempting to assign the seven-stringed lyre catalogue to Thrasyllus, the astrologer of Tiberius who wrote an «On the Heptachord» (Περί τοῦ ἑπτάχορδου) probably in the early first century A.D. (Porph. in *Harm.* 5 [91.14 Düring.]), which could well have included such a resumé of mythic and historical associations. An anterior source might be Hellanicus, who indulged in such rationalizations of ethnographic and mythological traditions, was from Lesbos, and wrote on Terpander.

τὴν λύραν τὴν ἐκ τῆς χελώνης φασὶ τὸν Ἑρμῆν εὐρηκέναι καὶ κατασκευάσαντα ἐπτάχορδον παραδεδωκέναι τὴν μάθησιν τῷ Ὀρφεῖ. Ὀρφεὺς δὲ ἐδίδασκε Θάμυριν καὶ Λῖνον· Λῖνος Ἡρακλέα, ὕφ' οὗ καὶ ἀνῆρέθη. ἐδίδασκε δὲ καὶ Ἀμφίωνα τὸν Θηβαῖον, ὅς ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπτά χόρδων ἐπταπύλους τὰς Θήβας ὠκοδόμησεν'.

They say that Hermes invented the lyre – the one which is made from a tortoise – and, equipping it with seven strings, handed on the study to Orpheus. And Orpheus taught Thamyris and Linus, Linus Hercules – by whom he was also killed. And he also taught Amphion the Theban, who «seven-gated Thebes constructed» because of the seven strings.

Like the lyre-construction scene in the *Hymn to Hermes*, the history of its most famous practitioners must have been a theme of enduring professional interest. The catalogue itself, of course, was a very ancient oral form; it is easy to imagine that this list was mastered by practicing musicians over many centuries, even after the demise of oral epic. One hesitates to classify the passage as music theory; yet clearly it belongs to the professional literature of music. It is therefore of considerable interest to note the incorporation of a dactylic phrase, ἐπταπύλους τὰς Θήβας ὠκοδόμησεν (– υυ| – – | – – | – υυ| – υ), «seven-gated Thebes constructed». Could this be a fragment of the Amphion episode attributed to Hesiod (fr. 182 [M-W]), or (rather less likely) of the Theban phase of the epic cycle?¹³

The final passage I wish to consider also comes from the lyre-invention scene in the *Hymn to Hermes* (50 sqq.):

καὶ πῆχεις ἐνέθηκ', ἐπὶ δὲ ζυγὸν ἤραρεν ἀμφοῖν
ἐπτά δὲ συμφώνους ὄϊων ἐτανύσσατο χορδὰς...
πλήκτρῳ ἐπειρήτιζε κατὰ μέλος.

And he put in the arms, and joined a yoke upon them both, And stretched seven consonant strings of sheepgut... He tested it with the plectrum κατὰ μέλος.

This is the first appearance of the word σύμφωνος («consonant») in Greek literature¹⁴. So much earlier is it than the next attestations that

13. That Hesiod composed on the subject was already questioned in antiquity (fr. 183 [M-W]), and while ἐπταπύλ- is common in epic formula (*Il.* 4.406, *Od.* 11.263 sq.; Hes. *Op.* 162; [Hes.] *Sc.* 49; also ἐπτα πύλ- Hes. *Sc.* 272), ὠκοδόμησεν and its relatives are found neither in Homer nor Hesiod.

14. Although the *v.l.* θηλυτέρων, recorded by Antigonos of Carystus [ch. VII Keller], derives no support from *Od.* 21.408 (*v. infra*) – which merely shows that sheepgut strings (gender neutral) were a traditional technical detail within the lyre *topos* – it is clearly too

some scholars are reluctant to see here any technical significance (Barker 1984-9: 1.43 n.18, cf. 1.295 n.177). And yet Apollo, hearing the new sound, explicitly inquires of his brother «What is this τέχνη?» (447, cf. 482 sqq.). Indeed, in light of the other technical phrases considered above, there is every reason for accepting these «consonant strings» at face value. The phrase κατὰ μέλος may offer some support for this. The MSS have κατὰ μέρος here, but the same (or similar) verse recurs at 419 and 501, where the reading is in both cases κατὰ μέλος; besides, an error of μέρος for μέλος would be easy to make. Allen/Halliday/Sikes (1936: ad loc.) thus gave κατὰ μέλος «the balance of evidence» and restored it in 53. Càssola countered that μέλος, in a musical sense, was not known to Homer (1975: ad loc.); but when the *Hymn* was composed, μέλος was a normal term for the musical tuning (cf. West 1992a: 177 and n. 57), and so that argument carries little weight. In either case, because the testing is done with a plectrum, the purpose must be to see if the strings are in tune, i.e. εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως. κατὰ μέρος would thus mean *singulas chordas tentavit num sonum iustum redderent* (so Baumeister 1860: ad loc.; cf. Càssola 1975: ad loc.). Similarly, κατὰ μέλος has been understood as «testing the strings by means of a melody» (Càssola 1975: ad loc., interpreting Allen's reading).

But a better interpretation may be possible. The phrase κατὰ μέλος is found three times in Aristoxenus' fragmentary presentation of his fundamental rule of συνέχεια or musical «continuity», where it seems to have a specific technical application (*Harm.* 27-29):

ὑποκείσθω δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐξῆς κειμένων φθόγγων κατὰ μέλος ἐν ἑκάστῳ γένει ἥτοι τοὺς τετάρτους διὰ τεττάρων συμφωνεῖν ἢ τοὺς πέμπτους διὰ πέντε ἢ ἀμφοτέρως.

And let it also be laid down that, for notes which are «continuous» κατὰ μέλος in each genus, either every fourth note is consonant at a fourth, or every fifth note is consonant at a fifth, or both.

abstruse to have been fabricated without some traditional background (Allen, Halliday & Sikes 1936: ad loc.). Yet epic themes and formulaic scenes have all the flexibility of the individual formula, admitting a range of variation from performance to performance (Lord 1960, 68 ff.); given the uncertain early history of the *Hymns* and their textual transmission, it is perfectly conceivable that both readings might have a claim to authenticity. Sophocles used σύμφωνον in his version of the myth (*Ichn.* 326 [Maltese]); one might argue that this induced an interpolation in the *Hymn*, but this is much the less economical scenario. Pindar uses the word in the non-musical sense of «concordant» in what is otherwise the earliest attestation (*P.* 1.70); but surely the poet was adapting an existing musical expression, since taken literally σύμφωνος describes sound, and especially a relationship between sounds. Hence I readily accept συμφώνους... χορδὰς as a viable reading in the *Hymn*.

οὐ δὴ προσεκτέον εἰ τὸ συνεχὲς ὅτε μὲν ἐξ ἴσων ὅτε δ' ἐξ ἀνίσων γίγνεται, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὴν τῆς μελωδίας φύσιν πειρατέον βλέπειν κατανοεῖν τε προθυμούμενον τί μετὰ τί πέφυκεν ἡ φωνὴ διάστημα τιθέναι κατὰ μέλος.

Do not be alarmed if «the continuous» arises sometimes from equal [sc. intervals] and sometimes from unequal: one must try to look to the nature of melody and be ready to understand which interval naturally comes after which when the voice puts them together κατὰ μέλος.

ὑποκείσθω δὲ καὶ τοὺς τοῖς ἐξῆς φθόγγοις συμφωνοῦντας διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς συμφωνίας ἐξῆς αὐτοῖς εἶναι. ἀσύνθετον δὲ ὑποκείσθω ἐν ἑκάστῳ γένει εἶναι διάστημα κατὰ μέλος ὃ ἡ φωνὴ μελωδοῦσα μὴ δύναται διαιρεῖν εἰς διαστήματα.

And let it also be that those tones which are consonant with «continuous» tones, each through the same consonance, are «continuous» with each other. And in each genus an interval will be incomposite κατὰ μέλος when the voice in singing cannot break it apart into [sc. smaller] intervals.

Adherence to συνέχεια guaranteed the proper constitution of a heptatonic scale (what Aristoxenus called a μέλος ἡρμοσμένον) by requiring the «responson» of every note to another note either a consonant fifth or fourth away (Franklin 2002b: 446 ff.). In other words, this rule – which Aristoxenus held to be the «first principle» (ἀρχή) of ἀρμονική¹⁵ – was concerned with the proper disposition of *consonant strings*. In the Aristoxenian passages, κατὰ μέλος clearly does not refer to melodies *per se*, but to the construction of tunings which must precede any playing or singing. Intervals of a μέλος ἡρμοσμένον which conform to συνέχεια occur in certain sequences «along the tuning», or are «in the μέλος».

This resonates strongly with the conjunction of κατὰ μέλος with ἐπτά δὲ συμφώνους... χορδὰς in the *Hymn*. Can one read here a similar technical meaning in the phrase? Not that there need have been any awareness of συνέχεια as formulated by Aristoxenus. But the reverse is perfectly conceivable: the Aristoxenian rule codified a means of tuning which was of basic importance already in the Archaic period. For the action of «testing» makes it clear that some definite tuning is intended –

15. *Harm.* 54 τούτου μὴ ὑπαρχόντος οὐδὲν ἔτι γίγνεται τῶν λοιπῶν ὀφελος. θετέον οὖν τοῦτο πρῶτον εἰς ἀρχῆς τάξιν οὐ μὴ ὑπαρχόντος ἀναίρειται τὸ ἡρμοσμένον ('if this condition is not fulfilled, there is no use bothering about the rest: and so this must be made the first principle, without the fulfillment of which the [sc. μέλος] ἡρμοσμένον is destroyed»).

that which is exemplified by the seven consonant strings. Ovid at least seems to have understood the passage in this way, to judge from his description of Orpheus tuning his lyre before a song (*Met.* 10.145-147):

Ut satis impulsas temptavit pollice chordas
Et sensit varios, quamvis diversa sonarent,
Concordare modos...

When sufficiently he tried the strings, plucked with his thumb,
And heard that the several tones, though they sounded separately,
Were consonant...

Finally, it is worth noting that the *Hymn's* lyre-construction scene also contains the first appearance of «harmonic» language (that is, words related to ἀρμόζειν or ἀρραρεῖν [**ar*, «fit or join»]) in conjunction with συμφων-, so common in later sources¹⁶ – most familiar perhaps from Plato's formulation ἡ γὰρ ἀρμονία συμφωνία ἐστίν («for ἀρμονία is consonance», *Smp.* 187b).

To conclude, the evidence considered here hints at an oral technical musical vocabulary during the Archaic period (with roots in the Dark Age, due to the very nature of epic diction), known to musicians who had mastered their craft – the state extolled by Alcman as τὸ καλῶς κιθαρίσδεν (fr. 41 *PMGF*). When such poetic expressions appear to be untechnical, or merely quasi-technical, it is not because the poets were groping towards an as yet unformed θεωρία. They were making quick and casual allusions which would, for other professionals, call to mind a body of technical language and concepts. For the non-musical listeners (or readers), these details would impart a technical flavor without obscuring the narrative. The inclusion of epic diction in later musicological literature mirrors this use of musical diction in narrative passages. The two phenomena meet in the late Archaic period when oral θεωρία began to give way to written, a junction which, for convenience, we may associate with Lasus of Hermione and his generation.

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16. Ion of Chios fr. 32.2 (West); Hp. *Vict.* 1.8, 1.18; Pl. *Cra.* 405c, *Resp.* 4.430e, 10.616b, *Phlb.* 56a; «Plato» ap. ps.-Plut. *de Mus.* 1138d; Arist. *Cael.* 2.9.290b12 sqq.; Plut. *Inst. lac.* 238b; *De E Delph.* 389d, cf. *De mim. progr.* 1030b; Theo Sm. 47.1-3; Adrastus ap. Theo Sm. 49.7; Iamb. in Nic. 118.21 sq. (Pistelli), 119.18 sq.; Aristid. *Quint.* 3.23 (125.15 sqq. W-I); ps.-Censor. *de Mus.* 6.609.7; etc.